

MultiSport Canada: Blog #3 – June 14, 2010
By Larry Bradley

The weather could not dampen my spirits as I headed towards southwest side of Hamilton early Sunday morning. I knew rain was in the forecast but I was not about to pull out of another race this season because of the poor conditions we have received over the past few weeks. Right away, it started to drizzle very slightly as I began my trip across the 403. It was patchy wetness along the lower Halton Region so I was not exactly sure what would be in store at the site in the Binbrook Conservation Area.

Although, it did not pour down, we still had on and off precipitation throughout much of the morning. Thankfully, the wind wasn't too strong and the air was just warm enough to keep the tights in the bag. By the time I parked the car, and went through the speedy registration process, I had just over an hour to rack my ride and set up my transition spot. This would have been plenty of time for a duathlon but with my limited experience getting into a wetsuit, I knew I would have to skip my bike warm up and make sure I was down to the beach early enough to get acquainted with the water.

After preparing my mat for a few different scenarios (hard rain, cold wind, numb feet, etc.), I had only twenty minutes left to suit up and warm up in the water. The course for the swim portion looked very large to this rookie swimmer. Since I am just getting used to a short pool at this time, these markers a few hundred metres away are intimidating. I hope this will change with more and more races but for now it continues to cast doubt over my race day plans.

Once down to the clean, sandy beach, I put in a few strokes to test my sighting and to find an easy, relaxed pace. My goal for the swim was to make it through the entire 750 metres in freestyle position and to stay calm no matter what came my way. I put in a few out and backs and then finally made my way back to the start area to find a spot to the right side of the course, away from the other experienced athletes.

As the horn sounded, I headed out and quickly found my rhythm in the open waters on the far side of the course. Without water proof timing technology, I had no idea what kind of splits I was producing out there so I had to trust my training and keep focused on the efficiency of my stroke. Thanks to the extra float of the wetsuit, I felt like I was actually going too easy so I had to remind myself that it was still early. Along this stretch, I encountered something new in my short triathlon life. I was actually passing people and hitting some feet and legs and bodies...

This was an odd feeling and I had to get use to it and make sure I became comfortable with the situation in short order. I expected this would eventually happen (reading all the other stories out there gave me an insight to this crowded feeling) so mentally I had my mind set that I was not going to panic and just keep plugging away. Silly as it may seem, but during this brief washing machine experience, I started to think about my football days way back in my teens. I did not shy away from contact in that sport so I used those old memories to help me deal with the confined swimming space I now found myself in.

Getting through one large pack, I pushed on towards the first corner and made the turn pretty close to the marker. I was now swimming way inside the route I visualized before the race. I figured it would eat up a lot more time to slide out to the outside again so I set my sights on the next buoy and tried to make as straight a line as possible. Up this short section I found plenty of smooth water and was gaining more and more confidence along the way. I was near halfway through the first leg of the race and my breathing and arm/shoulder fatigue were under control. Things were starting to come together...

On the next long straightaway, I ran into another pod of swimmers. It was not as crowded as the last group so I was able to slip in beside them. Hoping they were heading in the right direction, I used them to lead the way to the next turn. Everything seemed to go pretty decent from this point on and I hit the last tetrahedron marker and pointed myself towards the landing on the beach.

From my warm up fifteen minutes earlier, I knew the lake was not very shallow so I stayed in form until I finally made out the bottom in my goggles. I then went vertical and started to dash up the beach to the bike zone which was a soggy run through the mud about 250 metres long. I may have been more conservative than needed on this run but I wanted to make sure I did not get light headed as I did at Lakeside 2 last season. Even though I had two segments left in the triathlon, I was riding a high as I had just completed my first ever swim in competition without using breaststroke or rest stops to finish the distance. Wahoo!

I used this positive energy to hit the bike course with one goal in mind, to go fast! With an extra cautious exit out of the long driveway from the park, I had a slower start than expected but it did not take long after that to get up to speed thanks to the tailwind and downhill slope right out of the gate. My legs were feeling fresh so I put my new bike to the test as I made my way through the field of faster swimmers. Out on the bike, I stuck to my game plan and remained aggressive, except in the slightly wet, corners, and pushed out some pretty impressive splits.

Reaching the turn around with an average of 39.7 km/h, I assumed the trip back maybe tougher as it was going to have a touch of headwind and the final two kilometres back to the park entrance were mildly uphill. My new in race goal was to keep it over 39.0 km/h for the entire ride and then try to make up a few more spots on the run. Surprisingly, I was able to push even harder for much of the return to the park and picked off a couple other duathletes and triathletes in the process.

When I reached the final few kilometres of the ride, I was cycling in some open roads and was started to believe my top ten finish may actually be a possibility so I continued to send all these positive vibes to my legs. Looking down at my bike computer, before making the turn into the park, I had hit a 40.1 km/h split with only a couple hundred metres of work left. I did not have anyone directly behind so I let off the gas just a bit to get my legs ready for the run. At the dismount line I was still at 39.5 average and happy to hit another pre-race goal for this leg of the event.

I then used a respectable transition to get out on the trail inspired 6.5k run. The convenient downhill out of T2 helped to get my turnover up to speed which was key as I could see some competitors up ahead making their way out to the grassy path towards the damn. With the wet conditions of late, the course was very muddy and slick. I realized my pace target for this part was going to be in jeopardy so I just focused on the runners ahead to see how high I could move up on the results page. At the one km marker, I had passed a couple runners and had about five triathletes (one of those being a relay runner) ahead of me with three of them being within reach at the rate I was moving.

When we hit the turn on the far end of the grassy damn, I made up another position but was caught off guard by all the athletes making ground on me. Yikes, I had to pick it up even more as many of them were talented youngsters with running speed to burn. Within a minute or two of the switch back, one of them made his move on me running his way towards third. I used his effortless stride to motivate me and jumped on back. Together we eventually we pushed past the last spot on the podium but I was still a few metres back in fourth with around two kilometres left.

The next section of the race took us into another looping trail that was very slippery. On one of the downhill portions of the loop, I hit a very touchy spot that almost put me on my bottom. I barely caught my balance as I fought to stay upright. This mini adventure took me out of my running rhythm and I had to get myself rolling again to catch my pacer. Luckily, we had a short uphill climb (I love the up hills!!) coming back to the main beach where I was able to overtake the quick, future multisport star.

Thankfully, he didn't have an answer for my pass on this day so I held on down the chute for the third place overall spot and first in my Age Group. It was exactly the type of result I needed to prove that I didn't make a bad choice by moving into the tri for 2010. I realize I have a bunch of work left, especially in the water, to get where I would like to be in a few years but the progress is promising.

Even though the weather was not the best on this day, Jason and his Multisport Canada team and volunteers put on an amazing event. I have several other races coming up on this series and cannot wait to enjoy some new courses and sites this season. Next up for me will be the Welland Half Iron Distance in a few weeks so it will be interesting to see how the 2k swim turns out. Stay tuned for more on my work in progress.

Happy Training,
Larry Bradley

